

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. In a computing environment, a method comprising:
providing a manifest, the manifest identifying a set of
at least one tool that when executed collects data for
5 analysis;

providing a control mechanism to interpret the manifest,
the control mechanism automatically executing each tool
identified in the set to collect the data from a machine; and
receiving the data collected from the machine.

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2. The method of claim 1 wherein providing a manifest
comprises providing a mechanism that when clicked on links to
the manifest.

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3. The method of claim 2 wherein providing the
mechanism comprises providing a URL that when clicked on links
to the manifest.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein providing a manifest
20 comprises sending information about the manifest in an email
message.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein providing a manifest comprises sending information about the manifest in an instant message.

5 6. The method of claim 1 wherein providing a manifest comprises providing a site that may be accessed via a browser.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein for each tool, the control mechanism determines whether that tool needs to be
10 downloaded and installed to the machine, and if so, the control mechanism further downloading and installing that tool.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising, running a
15 reporting program to collect the data and package the data for transmission.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein providing the control mechanism comprises transmitting the control mechanism to the
20 machine.

10. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method of claim 1.

11. In a computing environment, a system comprising:
a set of available tools, the tools configured to collect
data from a machine;

a reporting mechanism that provides access to data
5 collected from the machine; and

a control mechanism that is communicated to the machine,
the control mechanism configured to execute a subset of the
tools to collect data, and further configured to operate the
reporting mechanism to allow analysis of the collected data.

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12. The system of claim 11 wherein the set of available
tools is maintained in a program store associated with a
software support entity.

15 13. The system of claim 11 wherein the control mechanism
executes the subset of tools by interpreting a manifest.

14. The system of claim 13 wherein the manifest
comprises a data file accessed via a URL.

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15. The system of claim 14 further comprising a
mechanism that selects a manifest from among a set of
manifests, the selection based on received user data.

16. The system of claim 14 wherein the control mechanism is communicated to the machine in response to accessing the URL.

5 17. The system of claim 11 wherein the control mechanism downloads to the machine at least one of the tools in the subset.

10 18. The system of claim 11 wherein the control mechanism installs at least one of the tools in the subset on the machine.

15 19. The system of claim 11 wherein the control mechanism compares a version of an existing tool on the machine with a version of a tool in the subset.

20 20. The system of claim 11 wherein the control mechanism operates in response to a received user request.

20 21. The system of claim 20 wherein the control mechanism executes at least one of the tools in the subset that was already installed on the machine prior to receiving the user request.